



Alianza ONG

Opening the Dominican Republic to Social Investment

No. 18

Since its creation in 1995, the Alianza de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales (Alianza ONG) has been promoting cooperation between the business and nonprofit sectors as essential to the Dominican Republic's development. Alianza ONG is a multi-sector association of 18 leading Dominican nonprofit development and social service agencies. In 1998, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) granted Alianza ONG \$133,885 over three years (DR-300) for furthering innovative community development partnerships between the private and nonprofit sectors, increasing information available on social investment, and facilitating corporate philanthropy.

During the course of the project, Alianza ONG

- mobilized \$180,000 for project activities, including support from 50 national companies;
- allied with the Consejo Nacional de la Empresa Privada (CONEP), an association of 68 Dominican businesses;
- produced, together with CONEP, three important social investment case studies;
- dedicated several editions of its quarterly magazine, *Sociedad Civil*, which it distributes free of charge to 28,000 people nationwide, to project-related themes;
- increased its membership from 13 to 18 organizations;
- organized eight workshops on minimizing the impact of natural disasters, strengthening state-civil society relations, creating NGO-business alliances to reduce social inequality, making public accounting systems more transparent and reforming the constitution;
- successfully lobbied for anti-corruption and NGO-related legislation;
- initiated contact and began to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, paving the way for the introduction of courses on NGO management;

- trained employees from 105 Dominican NGOs in soliciting support from and working with the business community;
- and managed a fund to support recovery efforts after Hurricane Georges.

Alianza ONG also published and launched

- the *Guía para la Inversión Social Corporativa en la República Dominicana*, an easy read for businessmen interested in familiarizing themselves with social investment's main tenets and basic terminology;
- the *Catálogo de las Organizaciones sin Fines de Lucro de Servicios a Terceros*, which catalogues many of the principle NGOs in the Dominican Republic and describes how these organizations can collaborate with businesses, the state, international organizations and other NGOs;



Photo: Courtesy of Alianza ONG

Ambassador Hans Hertell speaking at the launch of Alianza ONG's *Guía para la Inversión Social Corporativa en la República Dominicana*. Pictured from left to right: Hertell; Celso Marranzini, former president of CONEP; President Hipólito Mejía; and Rosa Rita Alvarez, Alianza ONG's president.

- and the *Estudio del Universo de Donantes Empresariales de la República Dominicana*, which summarizes the results of a questionnaire on social investment distributed to 400 Santo Domingo-based companies.

In addition, Alianza ONG led a series of cross-border meetings with representatives of the Chambers of Commerce of the Dominican cities of Salcedo and Santiago and their Haitian counterparts from Jacmel and Cap Haitien. While the main focus was trade, the cooperative agreement signed between the Chambers of Santiago and Cap Haitien, each its respective country's "second" city, has the potential to involve more businesses in social investment initiatives.

BUSINESSES AND NONPROFITS AREN'T SO INCOMPATIBLE AFTER ALL

Alianza ONG management has always believed that businesses and nonprofits can work together. However, the staff also recognized that many businesses in the Dominican Republic were wary of working with nonprofits. Moreover, Dominican businessmen simply could not imagine how they themselves might reduce poverty or the ways in which they were already doing so.

To nurture a social investment culture, Alianza ONG had to overcome both sectors' misconceptions about each other. Yet, despite this difficulty, Alianza ONG has begun to bridge the gulf that has separated the business and nonprofit sectors in the Dominican Republic. Because of Alianza ONG's effectiveness, the Dominican Republic has articulated a vision for social investment.

When **Helados Bon**, the Dominican ice cream giant, was looking for a new flavor, Manuel Arsenio Ureña had the answer.

Arsenio, a prominent Dominican businessman and former president of **Plan Sierra**, one of the country's most important community development organizations, had introduced the macadamia nut to the Dominican Republic in 1979. Ever since, Plan Sierra has been encouraging residents of Los Montones, a small, north-central town, to grow, harvest and process the nut. A big-time buyer like Helados Bon squared with this strategy for economic development.

At first glance, this Helados Bon-Plan Sierra relationship seems purely profit driven. And it certainly has generated profits: Helados Bon's macadamia nut ice cream was an instant success and increased the company's sales by 30 percent. The partnership has also created new employment opportunities for Los Montones residents and contributes significantly to the area's reforestation. Moreover, a portion of macadamia double cone sales is invested in the community nursery. It is a perfect example of the benefits of social investment: businesses looking to expand their markets and gain new customers can, at the same time, support the socioeconomic development of impoverished sectors of society. In other words, social investment can make good business sense.

The win-win nature of the Helados Bon-Plan Sierra partnership attracted Alianza ONG's attention for its value as a case study. Alianza ONG published the finding and encouraged the parties to share their experience with other civic-minded entrepreneurs.

THE FUTURE

Alianza ONG will work with the Kellogg Foundation, CONEP and the Inter-American Development Bank, among others, to continue to inform Dominican society about the benefits of social investment and volunteerism as well as about the role of NGOs, to develop more case studies on productive business-community organization partnerships, and to match nonprofits with businesses interested in working on similar issues.

Data cited herein were compiled by Alianza ONG and independently verified.

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